

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Love is the most powerful human emotion. We are at a loss for words when we try to express something as complex, and confounding, as love. We do not know for sure where love comes from, but we know that it is timeless. And it seems inexplicable that something so precious and powerful could exist in such abundance.

Forgiveness is a virtue. We need to learn to love everyone and forgive those who have shortcomings. While it is easy to forget our own faults, at times it gets difficult to forget the fault of others. It is time we stop judging and pointing fingers and begin to accept people as they are. When we overlook human frailties in relationships, we experience a sense of peace and contentment within.

We have heard of many people advising us: “Be patient, be tolerant!” But, is it possible to be patient and tolerant always? One cannot be a silent spectator to improper or unjust things happening around us. Patience is not how long one can wait; but how well one behaves while waiting.

It is good to introspect at the end of each day about how many people we might have hurt knowingly or unknowingly. It may not be possible for us to go back and apologise to them for our behaviour directly, but we can be conscious of not repeating such acts in future.

If you love someone because you have it in your heart, it won't matter if the other person is smart, makes you feel good, is good looking, or is a hard worker. You'll love that person because your heart is filled with it. This is true unconditional love.

To live a peaceful life, love and forgiveness is the mantra! All our change makers featured in Conversations have exhibited love without expectation of restitution with whoever they are working with. This unconditional love has been their mantra of success to make a difference in the lives of many.

Let us share our views or offer constructive criticisms in a manner which will reach the concerned. Practice unconditional love inculcate the virtue of forgiveness. This would make the world around us lovable!

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

“Most misunderstandings in the world could be avoided if people would simply take the time to ask, “What else could this mean?” — Shannon L. Alder



A recollection of our past surely takes us back to the questions that we used to ask as a child. Of course, some questions were welcome and many not. Yet, questions were the way we discovered our life. Along the way, the questions reduced and judgments, advices & assumptions became more prominent. To the point that we rarely ask questions and whenever we do we are quite hesitant. My own coming back to questions happened when I enrolled into a course of coaching. I struggled to ask questions.....every time my “coachee” would bring up something to discuss, it was ‘natural’ for me to give solutions. I had to really pause, listen and ask questions that gave the coachee insights about their own dilemmas. Asking a question that clarifies, that is generative leaves both the coach and the coachee empowered in their ways of engaging.

When one asks a question instead of making a conclusion from a fixed point of view, belief, or decision about something, one would be co-creating the future with the universe as the question energetically opens up the space for something different to show up.

At this moment, ask these questions to yourself and listen to your thoughts and feelings:

- What do you want?
- What's holding you back?
- What is it costing you to continue holding back?

- What new habits will you put in place to fortify your new mindset?
- What is the most meaningful action you could take now?
- What new skills or support systems will ensure your success?
- How could you have this conversation so it empowers everyone concerned?
- How can you learn from this problem so it never happens again?
- How can you create more value with less effort?

My practice of non-violent communication (NVC) again takes me to a place of observation instead of evaluations. Here again observations give me the foundation to ask questions, deepen my inquiry. A questions can be a request too. If you are engaging with your child, would it not be useful to ask a generative question than blame or judge?

I am really enjoying my journey back into the world of questions. By the way, it is useful to ask ‘What and How questions’ over ‘Why’ questions if you are reflecting about life, relationships. A wise friend once said, a why question is often compelling but the answer useless. So what you touched you most in this article?

Yours Energetically

Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi is trainer, facilitator and coach of the Positive Energy (PE) program. She is a spiritual seeker with a vision of transforming her own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey she has gathered deep insights and is continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, she is working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

She can be contacted at bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.

LEARNING TO ASPIRE

Women leadership and women entrepreneurship are two sides of the same coin. Nurturing one of them naturally complements the other, shaping the leader in them. This characteristic graph is even more apparent among women from underprivileged backgrounds because they genuinely look forward to opportunities that can improve their standards of living. “Unable to complete our education, despite our aspirations, we are forced to confirm to a specific path. Family, marriage, responsibilities, etc., are so typical that women’s identity is not even looked at,” laments Ms. Palaniammal, Founder of Jos Charitable Trust in Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu.

Palaniammal studied till class 10 and then stayed at home to help her parents. While at home, she took up a wide range of trainings in tailoring, acrylic board making, etc. “I tried almost anything that I could do so that I can set up my own business. All I wanted was a small enterprise, that could reflect my interest and personality,” she adds. She also joined courses to learn farming, poultry/cattle rearing and mushroom cultivation. Every time she tried something, the lack of support from her family was not only an impediment but also a disappointment.

Despite all the obstacles, she continued to groom herself. “I never took a break because I was sure I could convince my family someday. I could not afford sitting back because it would become easier for them to hold me down,” she says. As she learnt about government schemes supporting women entrepreneurs and providing them financial aid, her spectrum of exposure grew further. “I understood about banking and saving,” she recalls with amusement. She learnt to address common resource issues like repairing bore wells, pipelines, ill laid roads, etc. Most of all, the notion of water conservation was an eye opener, and she promoted this idea in her community.

She was sure that a commercial enterprise was necessary to be able to put all this knowledge to fruitful use. “I kept learning but eventually realised that I must be able to use all that I learnt for the betterment of self and community. Being associated with a few women who also aspired like me was a motivation factor,” shares Palaniammal whose first success was the formation of a women’s self-help group 25 years ago. This was a big step because she consciously decided to build a cadre of empowered women, who could plan better for their families and communities.

On the other hand, Palaniammal also got trained in photography and established her studio in 2000. Soon she also added photo copying and printing services. “I utilised the resources efficiently. It is only later, almost after a decade, that I got to know about diversification in businesses,” she laughs. Once she felt comfortable financially, she launched her Jos

Charitable Trust to build women’s social and knowledge capital on human rights, women’s protection mechanisms, life skills for adolescents, tuition centres for school students, trainings on safe LPG practices, awareness on government schemes, especially NABARD programmes that could be availed, etc. She also organised blood donation drives and encouraged blood donation in village communities, to build reserves in local health care centres.

According to Palaniammal, her big achievement is enabling women to be able to apply, process their loans and evaluate jewellery during purchase/mortgaging. “The SHGs I had formed are now able to effortlessly get in touch with banks to address their needs. These are women who once completely depended on their men folk for everything and are now, also managing tuition centres in their localities. The trust has established over 150 tuition centres and these centres are the nodal point for different training programs and interface meetings,” she explains.

She got to know about CSIM through her network but joining the course was not an immediate decision. “I was apprehensive because I now had too many responsibilities to manage. But the very first interaction with CSIM to enquire about the course removed all my doubts. CSIM taught me about running programs and my Trust efficiently. They first let us realise that what we have been doing is just right. It is very assuring,” shares Palaniammal. The concept of livelihood, she feels, is not only better understood by CSIM team but also they are able to visualise livelihood from different perspectives.

“I understood livelihood from what I had been through, so is the case with most women like me. But CSIM trained me to imagine livelihood

The very first interaction with CSIM to enquire about the course removed all my doubts. CSIM taught me about running programs and my Trust efficiently. They first let us realise that what we have been doing is just right



opportunities within the spheres of needs and influences of our villages. In true sense, we were enabled to build ecosystems that nurtured each other in the process of growth. This, from what I happen to see now, is a great contribution to development at the micro level. We all feel valuable now and we are all aspiring to do different things,” says Palaniammal.

Shanmuga Priya.T



WINNING THE TOBACCO WAR

A non-profit organization working towards up-lifting marginalized communities through self-sufficiency is the best way to describe Balajee Sewa Sansthan. Based in Dehradun, the organization is known for its rural outreach, direct and indirect services in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and for focusing on health, hygiene, women empowerment, farmer development, comprehensive rural development, financial inclusion and education.

Over the years BSS has worked on several programmes including bank linkage, skill development, training and consultancy, child education, micro-credit, water and sanitation, and tobacco control, to name a few. It also promotes consumer and environmental awareness and empowerment of women.

Balajee Sewa Sansthan adopts a systematic approach to conducting training courses and provides opportunities for skill development. It conducted diploma courses in sewing and beautician training between 2017 and 2018 too with the sole purpose of imparting skills for employment, and developing entrepreneurship among women. Donors like Give India Foundation have helped in training more than 100 women this year.

The NGO has also arranged for credit from banks to kick-start small businesses. It has provided backward as well as forward linkage for goods and services manufactured. BSS has said its next goal is to start government-funded skill training in partnership with industries. It has laid the focus on mandatory training for soft skills, presentation skills, and personal hygiene.

As part of its focus on water and sanitation, BSS has constructed low cost toilets in Patna & Lakhisarai districts of Bihar. It has constructed over 1650 such toilets so far, under the aegis of the Public Health Engineering Department. The campaign's aim is to ensure sanitation in rural areas with a broader goal to eradicate open defecation. It follows a principle of "low to no subsidy" where a nominal subsidy is given to rural poor households for construction of toilets.

Another area where BSS is deeply involved in, is the cause of tobacco eradication. "Tobacco is the foremost preventable cause of death and disease in the world today. Globally, approximately 6.4 million people die each year as a result of diseases resulting from tobacco consumption," the organization says, "More than 80% of these deaths occur in developing countries. Tobacco is a risk factor for 6 of the 8 leading causes of death. Nearly 12-13 lakh people die every year in India due to diseases related to tobacco use. Nearly 30% of cancers in India are related to tobacco use."

No doubt, a majority of the cardiovascular diseases and lung disorders are attributed to tobacco. Tobacco use by pregnant women leads to low birth weight babies, still births and birth defects. While BSS has been working in the tobacco control programme for over 6 years, the focus lies on 6 districts of Uttarakhand with the support of The Union South-East



Asia and Health Department-State Tobacco Control Cell. The organization is working towards focused intervention on Smoke-free compliance, TAPS ban and protecting minors through provisions of COTPA compliance in the state.

BSS engages stakeholders through workshops on tobacco control legislation. This helps in the implementation of the COTPA provisions in the State. It spreads awareness on the harmful effects of Tobacco. Through combined efforts of the Health department and BSS, Tehri district was declared smoke-free on January 26, 2015. Similarly, Mussoorie was declared smoke-free in the year 2018 on World No Tobacco in 2018.

To protect children and the youth at large, BSS has implemented the guidelines of tobacco free education institution (TOFEI) along with the department of health and education of Uttarakhand. BSS is working with the department of urban development to prohibit the marketing, manufacturing, storage, packaging and processing of any tobacco products in Uttarakhand without a license. Under such provisions, even licensed vendors will be required to comply with the provisions set in the cigarettes and other tobacco products act (COTPA) 2003 and the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. Under these provisions, the sale of any product that is primarily targeted to children like biscuits and sweets will be prohibited in shops licensed to sell tobacco products.

Estimates suggest this order would protect more than 10 million people from the harms of tobacco, and restrict opportunities for children to buy tobacco products.

Recognising the efforts in implementation of tobacco control legislation, the Health Department of the Uttar Pradesh Government selected BSS to conduct school programmes in Bijnor and Saharanpur district in 2016-17. The NGO was entrusted to conduct awareness sessions and workshops in 70 Government/Public Schools on the harmful effects of smoking and tobacco use on health. The objective of course, was to prevent the initiation of smoking among adolescents.

Balajee Sewa Sansthan started the 'No one sleep hungry' project after the announcement of the lockdown to provide food support to most vulnerable families in Dehradun and Haridwar districts of Uttarakhand. Under the current circumstances, the lowest strata of the society, comprising daily wage workers, construction workers, contract labourers, street vendors, patients suffering from acute health ailments (TB & HIV AIDS) have been the worst hit. These groups have lost the only source of their income and have no means to make ends meet or provide food for their families.

BSS also began its relief service by providing dry ration support to most affected people. Till date, BSS has served and delivered grocery kits to 500 families.

Rahul Philip

WARSAN: ORPHAN, REFUGEE, LEADER

Born in a country riddled with discrimination against women, Warsan Weedhsan fought her way out and found herself a refugee in Jakarta, Indonesia.

“You can be a writer.”

“No, my English is not good enough.”

“This is not the kind of English I can show to people.”

“Don’t call me a writer.”

Warsan Weedhsan chuckles as she recalls the many doubts she had when Natalia, a journalist, encouraged her to follow her dream of being a writer. After all, refugees aren’t expected to have dreams, they’re expected to survive.

For 28-year-old Warsan, taking that leap of faith was nerve-racking. Natalia was the first person to read her writing and had encouraged her to put herself out there.

All her life, she had been told otherwise.

From the age of seven, Warsan had to fend for herself. She had lost her family and spent her childhood growing up within the confines of an orphanage. In war-torn East Africa, where patriarchal roots run deep and where people derive a sense of identity from the clan they belong to, Warsan had the odds stacked against her. Being part of a clan is extremely important - to get married, to build wealth, to own property, and most importantly, to belong. An orphan female with no family or clan meant she was defenceless against the discrimination she faced.

“Family and community will tell you: ‘You are a woman. All your life [you’ll] end up cooking, cleaning and having kids. That’s good for you.’”

In school, Warsan faced constant bullying. But the words of her teacher and role model became the mantra that she relied on.

“If you learn well and never give up [on] your education, all your dreams [will] come true.”

Those words from her teacher struck a chord with her and till today, remain close to her heart.

The moment she learnt to write, Warsan journalled avidly. It was her special secret place. A place where she could hear herself clearly, where she held all her power in her hands and where she didn’t need anyone’s help. In her journals, she detailed memories of her life and dreamt of being a writer one day.

A dream that got crushed, when at age 16, she was brutally assaulted.

This prompted her to flee her country as it was getting too dangerous. The teenager was smuggled out of East Africa via plane and arrived in Malaysia with no one but herself to depend on. After three months in Malaysia, Warsan decided to head to Indonesia as word on the street was that it was better to settle down there.

Driven by the need to survive, Warsan was determined to learn the local language. Everyday she would spend hours on her



mobile phone watching YouTube, learning English first and then Bahasa.

“Learning English is for survival but learning Bahasa is for peace of mind.”

As she became more fluent in Bahasa, Warsan began finding her footing in her new home. She formed new friendships with the local Indonesians and strengthened the bonds within the refugee community. She is now an interpreter, a teacher and a leader, championing for women’s and refugee rights.

In 2019, Warsan connected with Kieran Kresevic Salaza, a foreign student doing a thesis on the refugee situation in Indonesia.

“I told Kieran that I wanted to become a writer, but I didn’t know how to do it,” Warsan

recalls. “Then Kieran suggested starting a writers workshop to help the refugee community.”

In October that year, Kieran flew to Indonesia to meet Warsan and together they started the writers workshops. To get the word out, Warsan created flyers with an application link and shared it with the community.

“I imagined maybe 10 to 20 people will apply,” shares Warsan, “but the application link was broken the next day as there were 99 applicants!”

“We came together and we introduced ourselves, ‘I’m Somalian’, ‘I’m Afghan’, ‘I’m Sudanese’. And [I realised] everybody

has a dream like me.”

The workshop was a massive success and the team continued the meetings until the end of 2019 when 20 writers had their own projects. That was when Warsan and Kieran launched the website, and called it The Archipelago.

“Archipelago is the name of the islands of Indonesia and Australia,” Warsan explains, alluding to her friendship with Kieran. “Our website is creating a network with the world’s writers. Not only refugees. Our mission is to support refugees, but we also want to build a network to integrate everyone.”

The passion to write, to learn, to express herself has helped her navigate the perils of life. But it has also helped her forge a community and build an existence, whilst remaining stateless.

“When I write something, I don’t say I’m a refugee writer, I say I’m a real writer.”

A story by Our Better World (the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation www.ourbetterworld.org)

EACH ONE TEACH ONE

Many would agree that for a population as large as ours and with historically disappointing literacy levels, access to education is a crucial ingredient to all-round development. Over time, legislation like The Right Education Act of 2009 has been introduced to help parents and students belonging to underprivileged backgrounds gain access to education. However, the challenges are aplenty.

Ever since its inception, Pratigya has dedicated itself to the cause of quality education. However, goals like good health and zero hunger also hold relevance to its purpose and existence. By the organization's own admission, however, it is education that holds the most relevance today.

One of Pratigya's most well-known achievements is its strides in helping improve access to education. Under the education scholarship program, the NGO supports disadvantaged children, and supports the journey of having that child find a good school that imparts quality education.

"The model that the organisation uses here is 'each one, teach one'," says Ajay Kumar, the Secretary and Co-founder of Pratigya, "According to this model donors throughout the world provide their generous support for such children." However no amount of education support would amount to much without actively facilitating the 25 percent Right To Education provision.

As per Pratigya's RTE facilitation programme, underprivileged families are helped and supported in their quest to find a good school at a nearby location. "According to the Right To Education Act, families of children from socially and economically backward communities have a right to 25 percent reservation in private schools for their children," explains Ajay.

Another programme of Pratigya's that has risen in popularity is the school and teacher strengthening programme, designed to provide quality education to students studying in government institutions. "It is a designed intervention to capacitate the teachers around foundational literacy and numeracy so as to engage the children in a better way, by increasing their understanding around it," says Ajay.

When it comes to imparting education and spreading it, resources are a critical component to making that happen. This is where Pratigya's URGE programme comes to the fore. Abbreviated to read Unlimited Resources for Generating Excellence, it is comprises a resource centre in far-off villages, equipped with facilities like libraries, computers, electricity and other basic resources in order to help bridge the gap between the developed and under-developed strata of society.

However, by Pratigya's own admission, implementing and practicing the 25 percent RTE provisions have been a challenge. "The current scenario is somehow different from the earlier one," says Ajay, "When Pratigya undertook this initiative back in 2013, there was almost no adherence to this Act due to which it had to file a PIL (Public Interest Litigation) in High Court of Jharkhand and to get it streamlined."

After a comprehensive research was conducted, it was later discovered that only 1.67 percent of reserved seats were filled up appropriately by schools coming under this act. "After winning the PIL, the Jharkhand Govt as well as schools created space for the proper implementation of this act," notes Ajay.

What were the challenges coming in the way of implementing RTE, however? Mainly, the non-adherence to the provisions mentioned in the act. The non-adherence to provisions mentioned in the act by schools as well as the state government was one of them. The lack of access to the RTE 25 percent application form for the perusal of parents was another. More importantly, the refusal of schools to provide data on students studying under the provisions of the act was a huge challenge towards verification, while filling up seats by admitting children of personal drivers and maids of school administrators was another reason that stood as an obstacle to ensuring fair distribution of seats.

The programme has been designed to develop Socio



Emotional Ethical Learning (SEEL) among the children who are either connected or not connected with school setting. It has basic three objectives: active participation of children in different activities at school, enhanced academic performance and to nurture them as aware and responsible members of the

society. Regular weekly sessions pertaining to life skills, interpersonal skills, civic education, financial education, legal education, language and communication, art & craft and extracurricular activities (like dancing, singing, debate, elocution, speech, storytelling, etc.) are organized with the help of professional resource persons, volunteers as well as mentored leaders in their own communities. Counseling sessions are also being conducted with the help of experts. Play way method and different forms of exercise are used as a tool to conduct these sessions. This programme has been instrumental in bringing the envisaged change and betterment in the personal, academic and social lives of the students. The programme has shown its impact as many children who have gone through this programme are now leading the same in their communities and nurturing new leaders making the intervention a sustainable one. Two other programmes that have brought a great deal of success to Pratigya are the organization's Yuva and Sanshray programmes. Yuva is a youth initiative to inform, inspire and mobilize youth to work for quality education for all, along with other social issues existing in the communities.

"We strive to provide a platform to the youth to express themselves, analyze the problem and work effectively to support the cause by organizing numerous conferences and workshops on politico-socio-economic issues like Transparency, Democracy, Personal and Economic Liberty, Individual Rights, Education, Poverty and Governance, among

other issues," says Ajay, "Engaging young people into some social action projects like internships and fellowships, Yuva looks to create community change makers."

On the other hand, Sanshray was a programme initiated by Pratigya during the pandemic in the light of facilitating livelihood support to people who lost their major sources of income. "From the second year onwards, it has initiated mentorship and livelihood linkages to youth so that they can be able to choose appropriate career options as well as livelihood resources for themselves," says Ajay.

In a nutshell, the goals of Pratigya are to ensure access to education, while enabling these children to remain in school and perform well while they're at it. The organisation is also dedicated to the cause of equipping children with all-round support for their physical and mental health, even as they empower youth to work contribute towards social change.

The NGO has expansion plans up its sleeve. Going by the effectiveness of its educational initiatives, Pratigya is looking to scale up its Srijan programme — a non-profit solution recognized by the UNSDSN in its youth solutions report of 2019. "Since this programme can be a solution for many vulnerabilities related to children and has an ability to create leaders within the communities, scaling up of such a programme can strengthen communities, families and individuals in a single designed intervention," Ajay signs off.





INDIA'S FIRST PET FOOD BANK: STRAY DOGS & CATS NEEDN'T SLEEP HUNGRY

26-year-old Musician Lionel Praveen a dog lover has been feeding around 150 stray dogs along Chennai's Marina Beach amid the pandemic, since the lockdown hit these dogs badly. Now he is a happy man as a first of its kind pet food bank in the city has made his work easier. On 24th February his canine friends along the beach tasted the ready to serve food he collected from Vetri Pet Food Bank at Thiruvanmiyur. Sharing his joy he told tellmystory.in "This pet food bank will motivate many others to feed stray dogs. Many may want to reach out to these paw friends but do not know how". He added, "Earlier I used to collect rice from friends and donors and my mother Kavitha cooked for the dogs".

Thanks to what's touted to be India's first Pet Food Bank, the kitchen serves around 400 stray dogs across Chennai every day. An initiative of Kirthana Raamsukaesh who has started this in memory of her late pet son Vetri, with who she had a special bond for more than five years. Kirthana a techie with an MBA who already runs a not for profit animal welfare shelter "Hope For Critters" for rescuing street animals says "A lot of people may be compassionate but may not be able to feed dogs and cats on a regular basis. Our pet food bank supports their work."

On day one, the pet food bank had an unexpected visitor. A woman sweeper working for the civic body asked for some food for dogs in her neighbourhood. Her gesture had turned Kirthana emotional. She said "I can't express my joy to imagine a hungry soul eat".

Deepa, another animal feeder who serves cats, said "Its a great initiative. These dogs or cats will get at least one meal a day and they won't sleep hungry."



On what inspired her to start this Kirthana says "I had always wanted to feed canines and felines. I was Vetri's world.

His passing gave shape to this first pet food bank".

Funded by individual donors Kirthana

plans to open up a second pet food bank in another part of Chennai to reach out to a larger canine and feline strays. The pet food bank can be reached on instagram (<https://instagram.com/hopeforcritters?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>) to register to collect food and to contribute for the cause.

The state of Tamil Nadu appears to be increasingly turning animal friendly. Last year the Tamil Nadu Government had allotted 20 crore for NGOs taking care of abandoned and orphaned animals under Vallalar Palluyir Kaapagangal scheme.

Courtesy: TellMyStory
www.tellmystory.in

Building Responsible Communities



Is growth all about class mobility? Is it always about better living standards? Mr. Narsing Rao Ramagiri, Secretary and Chief Functionary at Sahara NGO in Hyderabad, Telangana firmly denies. A group of college friends who actively engaged in a variety of social service activities were moved by the hardships faced by the 'middle class' families. Their personal struggles and their observations in the community forced them to question the status quo of the haves and have-nots. The complete employment scenario in the eighties and the challenges faced by underprivileged sections, rural population and migrants urged them to promote self-employment.

On the other hand, they also got to see gender discrimination in education and employment. Youth, as a cohort, they felt, needed proper guidance to make themselves employable. And the elderly, who were most comfortable with families, needed special attention as aspiring young members couldn't afford caring for the elderly. All these led them to conclude that growth is a common aspiration. It may mean different things to different people, but it definitely means improvement for a community as a whole, where every section of the population has its needs addressed. "Nobody must be left out. Which is why Sahara chose the community approach," adds Narsing.

Sahara was launched NGO in 1988 and engaged in different activities for children and elderly. The organisation formed children's clubs in 16 villages and built them as a medium for promoting child rights and eliminating child labour. These clubs, along with two joyful learning centers and eight schools for children who were engaged in labour were successful in making Boinpalli mandal (Karimnagar district)

child labour free. This community-based approach ensured that child rights was understood as a responsibility by all stakeholders alike. Acknowledged internationally, this model led Sahara to the 7th International Child and Youth Care Conference in The University of Victoria in Canada.

With the elderly, it was the community approach that worked well



for the people, but Sahara had its challenges. "Donors wish to see an institutional set up working for the benefit of the elderly. As we choose community approach, the outcomes were not hard tangibles, hence it became difficult for us to raise resources," admits Narsing. Sahara conducts regular surveys to maintain a database of destitute and uncared elderly. Such persons are provided with provisions, health services (through

camp, medicine supply), toiletries and simple livelihood options wherever feasible. More than 500 beneficiaries have benefitted from the initiative and 200 have enrolled for support services.

While service delivery is organised, Sahara sensitises the community members to provide holistic care for the elderly. "Awareness camps for children, youth in schools, and colleges not only helped Sahara to sensitise the communities on this issue but also led to understand why caring for the elderly

Vocational training programs focusing on workplace behaviour, communication, computer basics, tailoring, driving, mobile repairing, hardware works, etc., have been organised regularly. This has benefited over 2500 youngsters who have also been placed in jobs soon after their trainings. "Some of them are in entry level jobs but it made a huge impact on their families. Now that the youth are realising the value of employability, skill trainings have become a priority," adds Narsing.

With an active presence in more than 50 villages, Sahara managed to build a cadre of youth and adults who are also oriented about environment protection. As big as it sounds, at the community level, it is simple habits and responsibilities that have a crucial impact on ecosystems. Sahara utilised their social capital to build and strengthen environment values – growing trees, adopting trees, organising campaigns, plantation of saplings, building rainwater recycling units, etc., to have an incredible impact on the people and the planet.

Growth, they now understand, as a common goal, with responsibilities. Children, women, youth, elderly and destitute persons – all of them, together, make sure that each other's needs, priorities are attended to. They not only understand rights but also strive to help their communities realise the same. From being uncared for and destitute, beneficiaries have evolved to become sensitive caretakers and responsible individuals. This growth graph, Narsing insists, is what characterises holistic development.

Shanmuga Priya.T

was a challenge. Community members were oriented to plan simple programmes like a vaccination camp where they would arrange for pick up and drop facilities for the aged and also have exclusive counters to ease the vaccination process," he explains. Adopting grandparents has been promoted widely by Sahara and this, he says, has been very effective in distributing resources, and render support services.

HARVESTING UTERUS: ONCE DONE TO AVOID WAGE LOSS, WOMEN ARE NOW FIGHTING BACK

A survey conducted by a local NGO has found nearly 48 per cent of the women between the ages of 20 to 48 are operated on and sterilized in rural Maharashtra. They suffer several side effects like severe headaches and many are losing their sight.

Salhuntala Jagtap, 28, was just 12-years-old when she got married to a sugarcane farmer in the Beed district of Maharashtra. At the age of 19, she had three children.

“Every October, mukaddams (agents of sugar factories) from Sangli district in Karnataka used to take us away to work in the sugarcane fields. They used to hurl 26 of us inside a tractor, and we used to travel to places far away from home. We used to earn close to Rs. 80,000 for one season that spanned over six months,” she said.

But one day, when Salhuntala was loading the sugarcane into the truck, her menstrual cycle commenced. “I started bleeding and fell from the stairs of the truck. I could not get up for two days. More than the embarrassment I had faced, the money worried me more. If I don’t work for two days, the mukaddam will not pay us,” she added. At the age of 22, Salhuntala underwent hysterectomy surgery to get her uterus removed. The doctor had told her that she would get an ulcer if she did not remove it. Today, after six years, Salhuntala is bed-ridden. She has severe head and stomach ache. The family is barely surviving with their two teenage boys.

Carrying the burden on their bodies

“I am also losing my eyesight gradually. My husband can’t go to work in sugarcane fields anymore. It requires months of hard labour, and he stays home to tend to me. We hardly earn Rs. 24,000 in a year. Amidst all hardships, I nearly spend Rs. 1,200 every few weeks for the health complications I have today,” she said.

Not far away from Salhuntala’s small shanty, Asha Choure, 41, faces a similar problem. Her 12-year-long sugarcane work was halted at the age of 26 when she underwent hysterectomy surgery.

“Strong headache and loss of sight have forced me to stay at home. Earlier my husband and I used to earn Rs 70,000 a year. Today, my husband works alone. He earns Rs. 40,000 to earn two square meals every day,” Asha said.

Surekha Choure, 45, had a similar tale to narrate. She said the loads they carry during their work are close to 40 kgs. During the menstrual week, the weight is so strenuous that most women opt for surgery as soon as the doctor suggests. “Getting the surgery at the age of 30 was probably my biggest mistake. I can’t work anymore,” she added.

The increasing number of hysterectomies among the women sugarcane cutters in Maharashtra has left them out of work with persistent health problems and financial crises.



Women Claim that doctors misled them to get their uterus removed

A research done by social organization Navchetna found that 48 per cent of women in the age range 20 to 48 have been sterilised in Beed district.

Many operated women said their doctors from private hospitals had advised them to go for the surgery to prevent cancer. However, in many cases, the cancer was never detected or proven to be there in their bodies. None of the women we spoke to had the documents and papers related to the name of the hospital, doctor, and any post-operation treatment.

Laxmi Bora, one of the NGO workers in the area shared that most women who have undergone the surgery have been rehabilitated to other means of work like working in the neighbours’ fields, sewing or making purses. Most families, like Surekha, are under hefty debts that they have taken to buy buffaloes or cows to earn an extra living.

Aasvini Kale, 40, was offered the surgery when she was 32-year-old. But she had decided not to opt for it. “Today, I still work. During the menstrual week, I do undergo pain, but it’s just five days in a month. I suggest every woman I meet not to operate on the uterus,” she added.

A study conducted in 2019-20 by National Family Health Survey found that, 33,755 women, which amounts to three per cent women in Maharashtra underwent a hysterectomy. However, in contrast, in Beed itself, about 36 per cent

of women had undergone the surgery.

Beed is known as the district supplying labour to sugar factories. The drought-stricken area only has sugarcane cutting as the primary means of livelihood. The locals migrate for six months to places like Karnataka and Gujarat. These labourers are not government-registered and are deprived of the benefits of the social security schemes entitled to the general labourers. They are not provided with paid holidays, especially during the menstrual week in labour-intensive sugarcane work.

Several NGOs like Janvikas Samajik Sanstha, Navchetna and Wadmavli Lok Vikas Manch have been working on this issue for the last four years.

Baskar, one of the NGO workers said, “Each surgery costs Rs. 40,000 or more. It’s a profit environment for the medical sector and had gone unchecked for a long time. It only came to our notice a few years back, and several NGOs are proactively working to spread awareness among women.”

The possible solution

After the awareness, it became mandatory for the doctor to take permission from the district health officer before the surgery. But still, several cases go unchecked. A village witness at least three to five surgeries per month, Manisha Ghule, another NGO worker shared. The solution and the need of the hour is to provide

livelihood back to these women, she added.

Dr Devi R., a gynaecologist in Bengaluru said a potential solution is viable. She added that during hysterectomy ovaries are retained and untouched. Even doing so, there is a risk of limited blood supply that leads to premature menopause, often at very young ages. That leads to the symptoms the women are showing today.

“The solution can be putting the patient back on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRP) for over a year and gradually pausing it. That will supplement the good female hormones that had completely stopped secreting after the menopause,” she added.

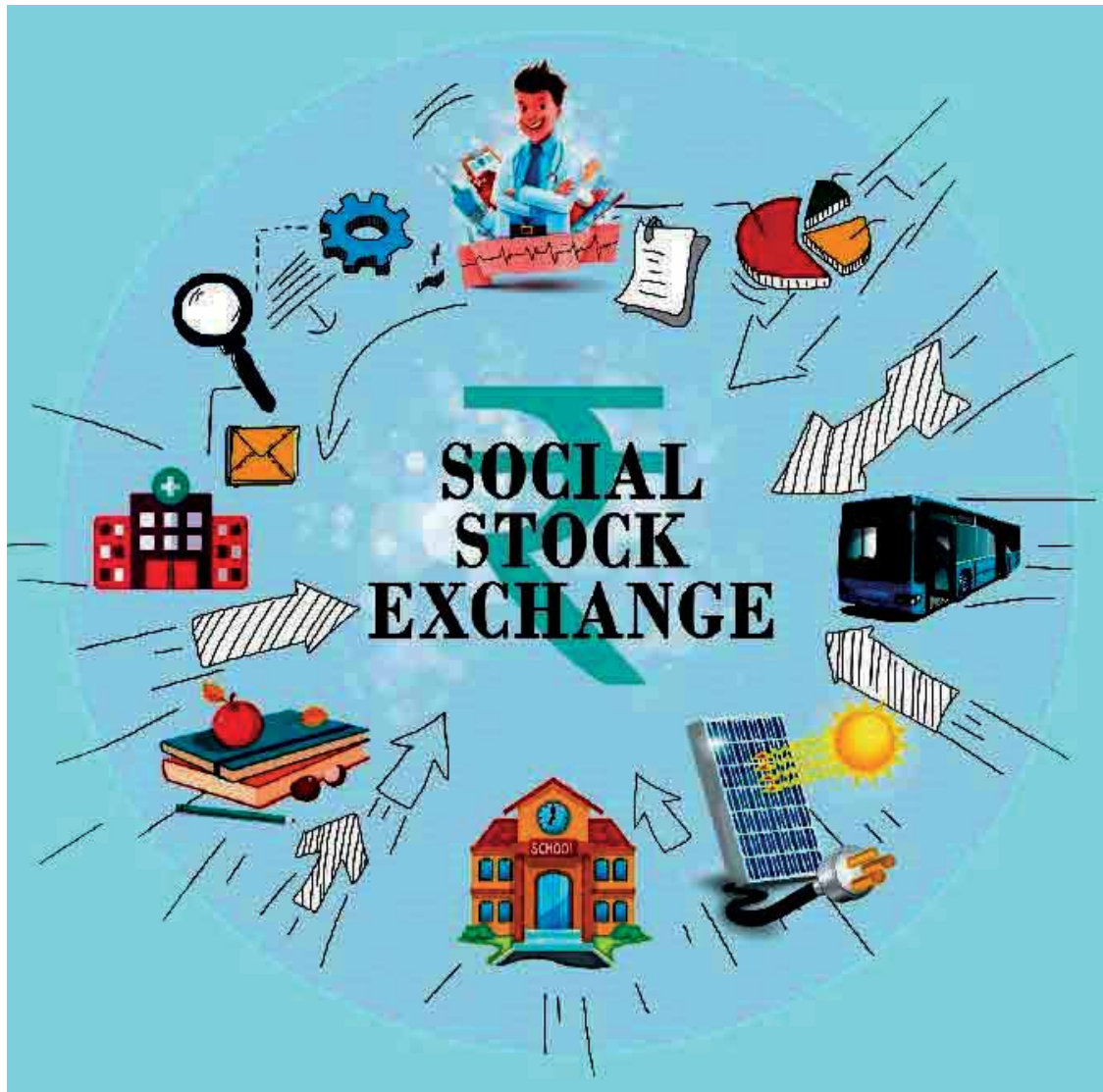
Kurubur Shanthakumar, President of the Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers’ Association believes the Indian Union government should make Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act 2005 available to the sugarcane workers. That would provide mediclaim facilities and paid leaves available for the workers, he added.

Today, Surekha has bought buffaloes that help her earn scanty earnings. Aasvini has taken up sewing and has been manufacturing purses. These women still stand up for the next generation of sugarcane workers in their families — not to repeat the same mistakes they have made.

Souptik Datta

Source: <https://thestoriesofchange.com>

SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR SOCIAL PROFIT



If a strong social enterprise cluster has to be setup, you need sufficient amounts of capital and other forms of financial and non-financial support. It has to be set up as an organisation with necessary governing standards.

The objective is to promote 'social enterprise' as 'social profit organisation'. What is 'social profit' and 'how to measure it'? Social profit is an outcome of making people, who were otherwise considered to be using up resources due to lack of skills, knowledge and self-esteem productive thus contributing to GDP. This can be measured.

Can there be a Stock Exchange like say 'Social Exchange' for Social Enterprises? It could be a great initiative if we derive answers to the following questions.

If the equity invested in social enterprises are not declaring dividends, how does it get a market price for Equity at premium?

Who will buy it at a premium leading to building up higher reserves for the social enterprise?

Can we give a tax break to signify the investment of Social Security to the buyer of a social enterprise?

Can the Equity with market cap will be a tradable instrument for raising capital (debt)?

Can the Banks which provide debt under this head, treat this as priority sector lending?

Lets collectively find answers to these questions and build a social capital for social profit!

PN Devarjan

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) has received the capital market regulator's nod to launch social stock exchanges (SSEs) as a new segment of the existing Stock Exchange, that can help Social Enterprise(s) to raise funds from public through the stock exchange mechanism. SSE will act as a medium between Social Enterprises and fund providers and that can help them to select those entities that are creating measurable social impact

and reporting such impact.

Certain type of Social Enterprises i.e. Not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) that meet the registration criteria can register on SSE and undertake to make continuous disclosures on their social impact. Such NPOs may or may not choose to raise funds through SSE, however, would continue to make disclosures including on social impact to stock exchanges.

The Social Stock Exchange

segment will provide new avenue for social enterprises to finance social initiatives, provide them visibility and bring in increased transparency in fund mobilisation and utilisation by social enterprises.

This thought has been penned by Shri. P.N. Devarjan, Founder, MSDS in 2010 in his book titled Musings of a Social Entrepreneur. We are glad that his vision is now becoming a reality.



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non-profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. www.csim.in

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CSIM also facilitates Social Accounting and Audit for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India (SAN India).

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"PND followed detached attachment and was inclined to financially support the needy."

Shri. P. N. Subramanian shares his memories with Shri P.N. Devarajan

Your early impressions about PND as a corporate professional?

My brother left Shriram Chemicals in Kota and joined as General Manager in Hindustan Organic Chemicals Ltd. I was told that he took a substantial cut in his salary to join this Public Sector Undertaking which needed somebody who could make the company more efficient and productive.

I understand that Shri. Lala Charath Ram wanted to retain him at Shriram Chemicals at any cost, but PND chose to move on as he did not consider money as a motivator. He felt that working in a PSU would benefit the government and our country. He became the Managing Director in three months' time and later the Chairman of Hindustan Organic Chemicals.

Many people used to tell me that although PND was a chemical engineer, he was equally strong in electrical and mechanical engineering as well. I was a school-going boy when PND was setting up Chemplast at Mettur. I even heard him receive a call from the Plant that some equipment had failed. It was around midnight and he walked across to the plant to rectify it. Although, he returned early in the morning he went to his office the same day on time. This was his level of dedication and commitment. I used to look at him with awe for his deep knowledge in any subject and the passion in his work.

My father used to tell us that we should always look at the larger picture and delve deeper as we will gain a different perspective. He quoted the general trait of cattle quickly grazing through the top blades as they are easier to eat. My brother PND delved deep in the way he handled things and that's why he had vast knowledge and experience. He would not like if we spoke at the surface level.

About the trait of philanthropy in your family?

The philosophy of sharing is

in our family. My father was a school teacher in Teacher's College, Model High School in Saidapet, Chennai. He used to tell us that when we educate a girl, the family grows very well. He used to donate 1 pice and raise 3 more pices from his fellow teachers or friends. He spent the 4 pices in educating a girl child. (During the British rule, the rupee was subdivided into 16 annas. Each anna was subdivided into 4 pices.)

Although my brother PND served in the corporate sector at a senior level, as a person, he was a down to earth person and wanted to help the needy. His thinking was more in these lines and always felt that he should support girl children. This thought came from our father and was the inspiration for my brother to focus on women empowerment, be it recognising women social workers or educating them.

Once, when PND received a scholarship in College, he shared this money with his friends who needed it to complete their education. He followed detached attachment and was inclined to financially support the needy. He felt that contributing to the needy was more important when compared to providing more for his near and dear ones.

I also believe in detached attachment. While I would spend for my children's education and expenses, I would never start a business hoping that they would take it over. When I was 59 and started engaging in natural farming, people have asked me if my children would manage the farm after me, and if not, wouldn't the investment be a waste. I replied saying: "I am earning for what I want to do and I am passionate about it. It is up to them to choose my path and in case they are not inclined, I would give it away to a social organisation or to someone who wants to run it."

Your Interest in farming?

I believe in leaving behind for the next generation: good soil, good air, good water, good environment and safe food to eat. These are all the



ancestral property that one can hand over to our next generation almost in the same state that was inherited. Beyond this, we can give them land or anything else. I gained this philosophy a result of my interactions with my father and brother.

I keep saying that it was during the mid-1960s, when India experienced two severe droughts which led to food shortages and famines, we adopted the Green Revolution bringing in chemicals and pesticides to grow more food produce. At some point of time, we should have reduced the usage and gone back to our natural farming practices, which we didn't. I do feel that people like me (who are over 60 years of age) intentionally or unintentionally supported chemical farming which has led to several diseases and poor health conditions.

Those days, it was "Unave Marunthu" but these days it is "Marunthe Unavu". I believe that we have to disseminate information so that we see some good change in others. It is being said that in another 60 years' time you will not have enough lands to cultivate and

there will be innovation to have a pill instead of food to eat.

What were the key learnings you had from PND?

Personally, PND was a fatherly figure. He was very disciplined and an accomplished person at a young age. I dreaded him in the early days and the moment I started working our relationship changed. He was busy with his own work but did not miss an important function in the family. He had a strong network and I learnt my networking and people orientation skills from him. Sub consciously, he also influenced me to venture into the corporate sector.

When PND was with Reliance he used to help many start a company, but never wanted an equity stake. He used to say that with equity comes ownership, and he was interested only in building industries with the right kind of people, right kind of technology and then leave it to them to handle it. He would always think ahead in different innovative ways. It would be like at least 10 balls up in the air that he would juggle with. Nothing will fall down as he

would handle all of that. I have learnt this skill from him.

Your inspiration to engage in the social sector?

My father, PND and my elder sister have been my influencers to engage in social work. My sister used to teach poor children in the evenings. My brother also has been my inspiration. I was more of a volunteer during the early days of CSIM. PND at some point of time wanted to pursue other passions and asked me whether I would take over as Managing Trustee. I gladly accepted the offer as it was an established organisation with a lot of dedicated people and it was the best to happen.

I like to empower people and delegate work. Even if people make mistakes, I always tell them that they should not repeat the same mistake. I would like everybody to be a leader and deliver on their own. I never like to micro-manage and we need to collaborate to do the work. We can't be fully democratic and need some kind of moderation. I always believe in Empathetic leadership style.